



WINSLOW HOMER THE CROQUET GAME

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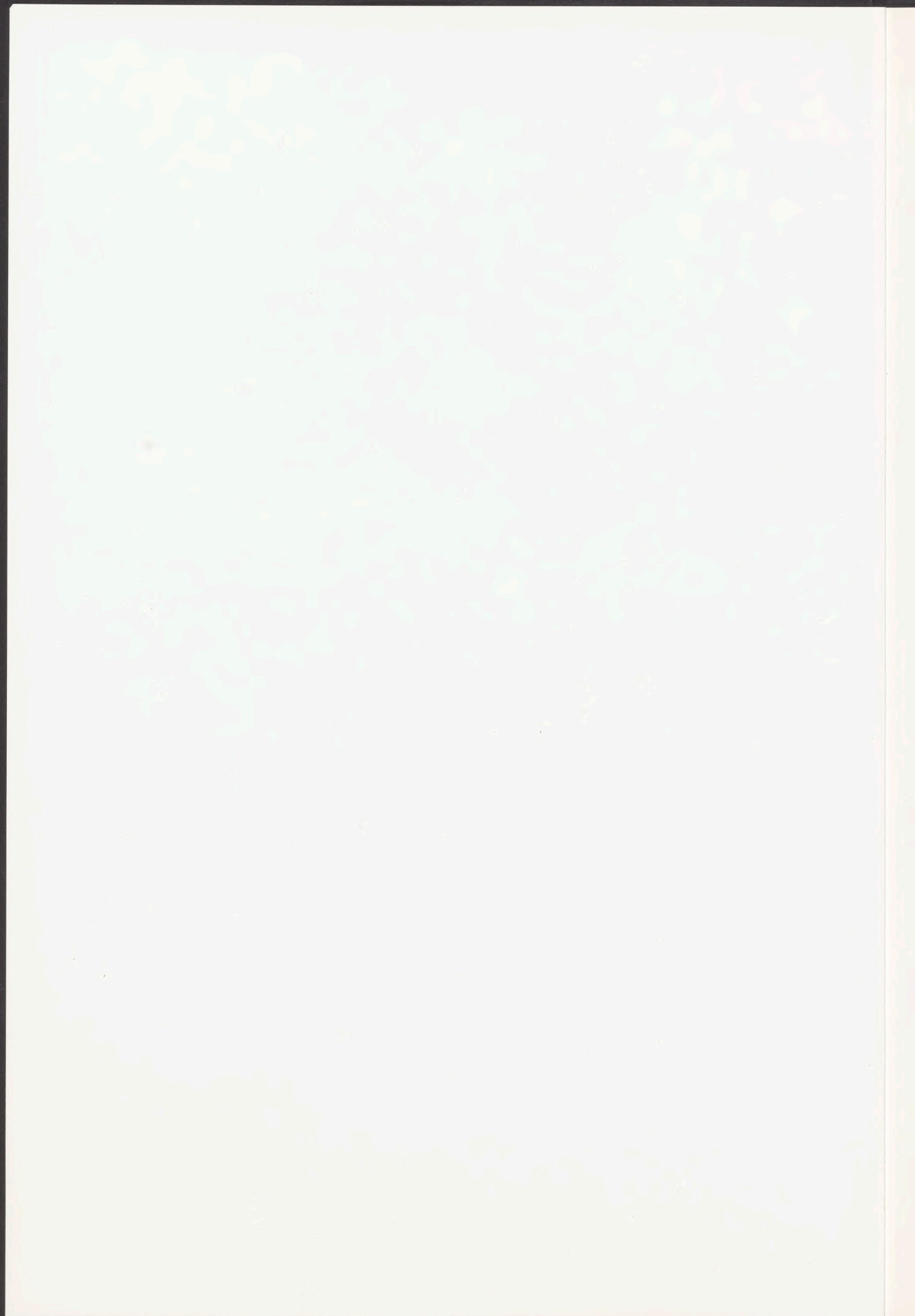
National Academy of Design, New York, New York  
March 7 – May 5, 1985



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# WINSLOW HOMER THE CROQUET GAME

By David Park Curry

Yale University Art Gallery · New Haven · Connecticut

Exhibition organized by the Yale University Art Gallery

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Cover:

*A Game of Croquet*, 1866

Yale University Art Gallery

Bequest of Stephen Carlton Clark, B.A. 1903

(Figure 14)

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## Foreword

The idea for an exhibition of Winslow Homer's croquet paintings grew out of conversations I had in 1980 with David Park Curry, Curator of American Art, Denver Art Museum, but at the time a Prize Teaching Fellow in the Department of the History of Art, Yale University, and Milo M. Naeve of The Art Institute of Chicago. Not only would these five works be shown together for the first time, but we believed that such an exhibition could demonstrate how a very small number of art works could address significant themes. Mr. Curry's interest in American social history and the work he happened to be doing at just that time on the game of croquet made him uniquely qualified to undertake the project. His interpretation of the objects brings fresh insights to these well-known works. From the first, his commitment to the project has made it a special pleasure to work with him.

To show the complete croquet series, we were dependent on the generosity of the lenders. We are therefore very grateful to them for parting with their objects for so many months. Sarah Buie's sensitive design for the exhibition allowed Homer's paintings to be shown at their best. The beauty of the catalogue is eloquent testimony to the skill of Greer Allen. As always, Joseph Szaszai and Geri T. Mancini were unfailingly helpful in providing photographs. Even the smallest exhibition requires an enormous amount of attention. I am indebted to Agnes

Berry, my secretary, and Diane Hoose and Louisa Cunningham, past and present Business Managers, who tended to many administrative details. Deborah J. Johnson, a National Museum Act Intern in the American Arts Office in 1983-84, oversaw publicity, gathered photographs for the catalogue, and helped with proofreading the catalogue. Richard Field and Lora Urbanelli in the Department of Prints and Drawings provided important advice and assistance for the works on paper. Rosalie Reed, Registrar, and her staff supervised the loans and transportation with their usual efficiency and courtesy. Robert M. Soule, the Building Superintendent, and his staff carried out the exhibition installation.

We recognize that this exhibition and catalogue could not have occurred without a particular kind of support from Alan Shestack, the Henry J. Heinz II Director of the Yale University Art Gallery: long before financial backing had been secured, his enthusiasm and commitment to the idea of the show made it possible for us to go forward.

Helen A. Cooper  
*Curator of American  
Paintings and Sculpture  
Yale University Art Gallery*



## Acknowledgments

At its best, the croquet game of the 1860s and 70s offered "rational enjoyment" based upon the cooperation of several players. Success was linked to the exercise of clever strategies devised by members of the side. Much of my enjoyment on this project has come through working with Helen Cooper, Curator of American Painting at the Yale University Art Gallery, along with the following people without whose many contributions neither catalogue nor exhibition could have been completed: Susan Casteras, Wanda Corn and her Homer seminar at Stanford University, Jim Haden, Barbara Krulik, Margaretta M. Lovell, G. Rebecca Morter, Ellen Nollman, Jack Osborne, Ruth Philbrick, Lloyd Rule, Alan Shestack and the staff of the Yale University Art Gallery, George T. M. Shackelford, Marc Simpson, Martha M. Smith, Christopher Sproat, Doreen Squilla and Jill Sussman of the Marion Goodman Gallery, Carol Troyen, Stan Turek and Judith Wilson. I am deeply grateful to all of them for sharing information, ideas and criticisms, for handling the logistics, for designing the exhibition and catalogue, and not least for their encouragement and patience in the face of deadlines. Currently, my greatest enemy is time. I have drawn comfort from the aid of these friends and colleagues, and am reminded of a passage from *Croquet as Played by the Newport Croquet Club*, 1865, "If you are a rover, leave yourself close to your friend. He can then croquet you towards the enemy who played last, whom you can afterwards demolish with impunity."

David Park Curry  
Curator of American Art  
Denver Art Museum

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## Winslow Homer The Croquet Game

During the 1860s, the American artist Winslow Homer undertook the earliest sustained treatment of croquet to appear in fine art. His series consists of five oil paintings. Two surviving chalk drawings are related to these oils, and Homer ended his series with a pair of wood engravings that are loosely based upon the last painting. His croquet images fall into three groups, executed in 1865, 1866, and 1867-69. Homer's interest in croquet coincides with the appearance of illustrated rule books heralding the transfer of the game from England to the United States. From the outset, Homer's images of croquet display knowledge of the rule books and familiarity with conventions of the game.

Homer's croquet pictures furnish raw material for a study of his ties with popular imagery. The series reveals something of Homer's creative process early in his career, showing him to be an efficient artist who reworked previously developed figures into new compositions. Whereas it might be hoped that Homer's croquet series would illuminate, to some extent, the much-discussed question of his attitude towards women, in fact these early works reveal only Homer's response to social convention. The artist's private feelings remain enigmatic.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the croquet images establish Homer's interest in themes from modern life, an area of inquiry that certainly engaged Homer's European contemporaries. If the croquet series is any indication, themes from modern life should prove a rich vein for exploration in the history of American as well as European art. Homer's croquet series is emblematic of the wholesale invasion of popular culture into the realm of fine arts during this period. The iconography of the croquet game, established in popular literature of the 1860s, is seen in its infancy in Homer's work. Once social conventions of the game became artistic ones, they were faithfully reflected in the arts.

Origins of the game are somewhat obscure, but croquet is related to a fourteenth-century French peasant game, *paille maille*, which involved the use of mallets, balls and hoops similar to those employed in the game as we know it. *Paille maille* became popular in England at the court of Charles II, and its name gradually evolved to "Pall Mall." The street known by

that name in London was originally a playing ground.<sup>2</sup> While the name survives, the game itself waned in popularity during the 18th century. By the time it reemerged as croquet, the game's French antecedents seem to have been largely forgotten, but a cartoon, published in *Every Saturday* in 1870, pokes fun at the game's French-sounding name (Figure 1). During the 1870s croquet became popular in France as well as in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Modern croquet was introduced to England via Ireland in about 1852 or 1853. It had been played in Ireland since the 1830s. Irish players called their game *crooky*. Although *crooky* is probably a descendant of *paille maille*, confusion over the game's origins seems to have lent it a modest amount of exotic romanticism during the 1860s and 70s.<sup>4</sup> One rule book noted that croquet's "origin, though recent, is shrouded with a veil of mystery, this fact alone imparting to the game an additional degree of interest."<sup>5</sup>

Like many fads, croquet started as an entertainment for the wealthy. At first:

"...the cracking of croquet-balls could only be heard upon the lawn of the lordly mansion. Throughout most parts of the country there were 'croquet clubs', exclusively under the direction of ladies, each consisting of ten or a dozen families, the 'best', of course, who lived within driving distance of one another, and whose grounds, as well as tables, afforded the necessary accommodation."<sup>6</sup>

The croquet field has always been dominated by women (Figure 2). Croquet received steady comment in the press as the first sport to allow Victorian women to participate in physical activity while in men's company. Thus the game was linked with other social activities organized by women. Croquet parties were held every week or two during the summer season: "they were very extensive...expensive affairs, each costing a cold champagne dinner for nearly a hundred guests, and compensation to a band of musicians...Croquet, appointed for three p.m., commenced playing at four, and was continued up to seven." This was usually followed by supper



1 "Croaky," wood engraving,  
*Every Saturday: An Illustrated Journal*  
*of Choice Reading*, I, 12 March 1870, p. 176.

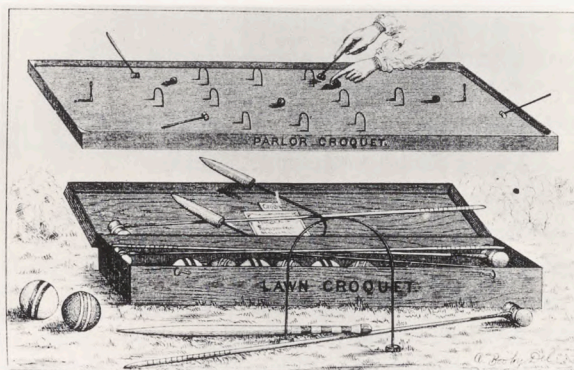


CROAKY.

2 Members of the family of British Prime Minister Gladstone  
 playing croquet at Fasque, Kincardineshire in the 1860s,  
 photograph, reproduced in James M. Charlton  
 and William Thompson, *Croquet. Strategy,*  
*Rules and Records*, New York, 1977, p. 18.



3 *Croqueterie* for Parlor Croquet and Lawn Croquet,  
 wood engraving, from A. Rover (pseud.),  
*Croquet; Its Principles and Rules*, 3rd ed.,  
 Springfield, Mass., Milton Bradley Toy Company, 1867, p. 49.





and dancing which lasted until about ten-thirty in the evening.<sup>7</sup>

Croquet "strayed beyond the boundaries of the private park" in about 1853 when a French toy manufacturer, John Jaques, started mass production of croquet equipment in Britain. A contemporary writer credited Jaques with the sport's burgeoning popularity:

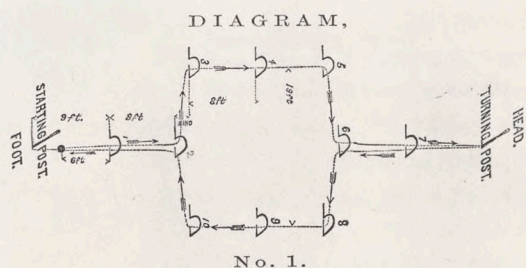
"...the London toymaker Jaques...was among the earliest manufacturers of [croquet implements]...By dint of a great deal of advertising, [he] gained such preeminence over his trade rivals, that he was enabled to set the fashion for all England, and, as we find, also for America: since manufacturers in this country appear, one and all, to have copied him to a 'turn'."<sup>8</sup>

The equipment was called the *croqueterie*. A complete set included "eight balls, eight mallets, ten iron bridges, and two posts" (Figure 3).<sup>9</sup> By 1866, Milton Bradley, an American toy company in Springfield, Massachusetts, had patented its own set of *croqueterie*, in an "elegant chestnut box."<sup>10</sup> It was not long before enthusiastic American amateurs were "trotting out the scape-goat" or finding themselves "sent up Salt River" to use then-current croquet slang.<sup>11</sup> Homer may well have been among them (Figure 8).

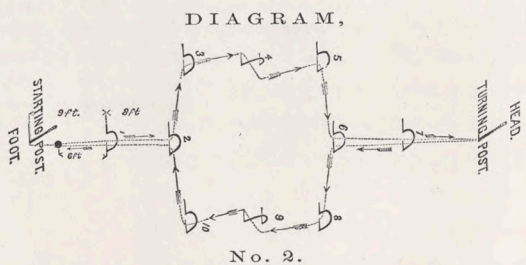
Although croquet matches were soon shorn of champagne suppers and imported orchestras, appeals to elegance continued to be an essential part of the language of the game as mass-produced *croqueterie* became available to a broad audience. A spate of rule books, some of them supplied by the toy manufacturers, was the chief means through which the game spread to the United States. In general, the American rules of the 1860s and 70s conform to British rules set forth in Routledge's *Handbook of Croquet*, 1861.<sup>12</sup> Another British book, Captain Mayne Reid's *Croquet: A Treatise and Commentary* of 1863, was republished in New York in 1869, but must have been available to Americans before then. In 1865, the Newport Croquet Club, one of the earliest in the United States, cited Reid's treatise as central to the introduction of the game here.<sup>13</sup> Early publications were mercilessly



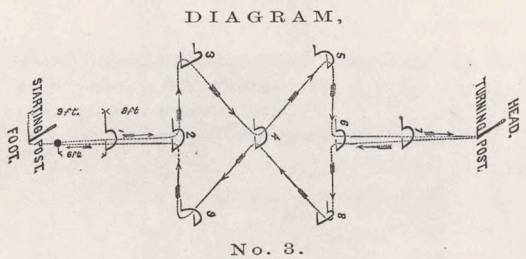
4 End post, wood engraving, from Rover, 1867, p. 14.



5 Arrangement of bridges for beginners, wood engraving, from Rover, 1867, p. 27.



6 Arrangement of bridges for advanced players, wood engraving, from Rover, 1867, p. 29.



7 Arrangement of bridges for a fourhanded game, wood engraving, from Rover, 1867, p. 31.





8 Homer, *The Croquet Players*,  
1866, inscribed l.r.: "W. H."  
Chalk drawing, 11 5/8 x 10 inches  
(29.5 x 25.4 cm.), inscribed verso:  
"Belmont July 7th 1866" (not  
Homer's hand). The  
Metropolitan Museum of Art.



giarized; texts and illustrations were slightly altered and reprinted under such facetious pseudonyms as "R. Fellow" or "A. Rover."<sup>14</sup>

A number of rule books were published in 1865, the year Homer began his croquet series.<sup>15</sup> These ephemeral publications are often pocket-size, and are illustrated with rather crude woodcuts that became the foundation for conventional depictions of the game in fine art.

Croquet is a sequential game, played clockwise. A player turned left after "running the second bridge" or passing the ball through the second hoop. Two to eight players, divided into teams, could participate. Individual players were identified by the colors on mallets and balls; the sequence of play was indicated by the order of stripes from top to bottom of posts at either end of the field (Figure 4). Team leaders were denoted by the two uppermost stripes on the starting and turning posts. Although the standard layout of the croquet field was imported from England, numerous variants were used in America (Figures 5, 6 and 7). One rule book noted that "as the player's knowledge of Croquet increases, many other positions will suggest themselves."<sup>16</sup>

The object of the game was to pass through all the hoops in sequence, completing the "grand round," and to strike the two posts. The first side to have all members do this was declared the winner. A player who had run all the bridges but not struck the starting post became a "rover" and could roam the field, aiding his team members and harassing his enemies. One's turn could continue for several strokes, because "driving a ball through a bridge, or hitting another ball, generally imparts the privilege of an additional stroke."<sup>17</sup> Hitting another ball was known as the *roquet*. It allowed one to perform the *croquet*, the shot that gave the game its title. Reid's rule book solemnly intoned, "As the *croquet* is one of the most important acts of the game, the rules relating to it must be strictly adhered to."<sup>18</sup> It was performed as follows:

"The player, having obtained the right to croquet a ball, by having made a roquet or ricochet upon it, takes his own ball from the ground, and

places it in juxtaposition with the one he has roquet'd. Then, pressing his foot on his own ball, so as to hold it in place, he strikes it a smart tap with his mallet—the shock thus communicated sending the other ball wherever he may desire it to go."<sup>19</sup>

It is not surprising that this dramatic shot became the instantly recognizable iconic image of the game, portrayed in illustrations (Figure 9) and adopted by painters, Homer foremost among them.

Although *Croquet Player*, Homer's first treatment of the game, has a tentative unfinished quality with thin, dry brushwork on a dark and murky ground, the artist immediately seized upon the game's most salient moment (Figure 13).<sup>20</sup> The solitary figure is about to engage in the act of croqueting another ball. She wields her mallet with one hand, using the other to lift up her skirt. Each action is touched upon in the rule books, which emphasized the "fashionable bend" of the players' bodies, and "easy and pleasing attitudes in playing." Homer's figure executes a correct stroke—as Horace Elisha Scudder promised beginners, "very little practice will show one that to hold [the mallet] in one hand and swing it from the side gives the finest blow and is most graceful."<sup>21</sup>

Homer's subject is somewhat inappropriately clad, at least by rule book standards:

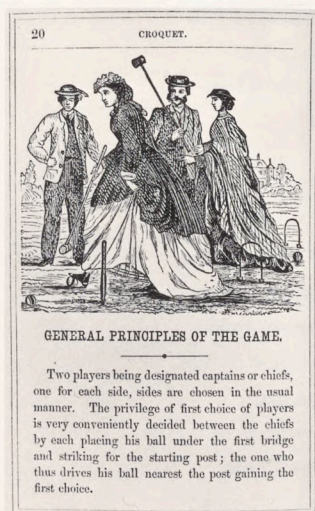
"With all deference we suggest to ladies that, where it is possible, they should dress with some regard to the requirements of the game; it is hardly conducive to elegance to behold a half dozen officious young gentlemen hovering about a lady as train-bearers and fly-catchers whenever she wishes to perform the croquet, and we protest against those sweeping skirts that whisk the balls about and change the whole feature of the field."<sup>22</sup>

Homer's second painting, *Croquet Players*, further develops the initial concept (Figure 22). The painting is almost twice the size of the first, and the somber palette of the first picture has given way to a cheerful scattering of bright dresses and croquet balls across the field. This time, the





9 Frontispiece, wood engraving, from R. Fellow (pseud. Horace Elisha Scudder), *The Game of Croquet. Its Appointment and Laws, with descriptive illustrations*, New York, Hurd and Houghton, 1865.



10 Group of players including a woman about to make the croquet shot, wood engraving, from Rover, 1867, p. 20. We may assume that Homer saw an earlier edition.



11 "Placing the Ball for a Croquet," wood engraving, from *How to Play Croquet*, Boston, Amsden and Company, 1865, p. 28.



12 Winslow Homer, *Portrait of Miss Florence Tryon*, 1868, crayon and Chinese white, 9 1/2 x 7 1/2 inches (24.1 x 19.2 cm.) inscribed l.l.: "WH.", "June 1868.", Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Bequest of Grenville H. Norcross. The inscription is not entirely clear and has also been interpreted as "1866."



*croqueterie* is quite clearly painted. It conforms to the equipment suggested in the rule books. The party is using balls marked with colored stripes, showing the order of play. However, since the end stake is obscured by the couple at the far left, we cannot distinguish the order here—Homer is consistent with other artists who adopt material from popular culture but simplify it and make it ambiguous to serve the purposes of fine art.

We can surmise that the party is using a toy manufacturer's set, probably made of expensive boxwood. Beautiful mallets and balls with stripes were intended for ostentatious display:

"...it is just as if you played billiards with balls of solid gold, instead of ivory; the shine and "grandeur" of the metal being more an object in your eyes than the pleasure of the play.... A ball of boxwood is an absurdity... Jaques introduced them, because it enabled him to charge three guineas for a set... and this brings us to another of the iniquities introduced by Monsieur Jaques—the colored stripe, or band, around the balls. It was done to avoid concealment of the costly wood!... there will be harlequins in the croquet arena, as on the stage of a theatre... [but] anyone should understand that the eye, in making the stroke, must be misled by the stripe. To beginners it is not of much consequence."<sup>23</sup>

In date, *Croquet Players* coincides with the publication of the earliest guidebooks in America, suggesting that Homer painted amateurs at play. He included six players—two more than the number considered perfect for serious games involving carefully worked out strategies and teamwork.<sup>24</sup>

Long shadows suggest that the game is taking place in the late afternoon, the customary time for croquet matches. Although the general appearance of the scene reflects the game's actualities, artistic license has been exercised. The painting has the static quality of a studio image. Homer has foreshortened the field and has distributed the hoops in a manner that does not precisely conform to any standard plan. The figures are divided into two distinct groups: in the foreground a triad of self-involved women, in

the background a single player and a mixed couple, awaiting their turns. The postures struck by figures in the painting are remarkably close, not only to illustrations in rule books, but also to photographs of actual croquet parties, (Figure 2).

In the Albright-Knox painting, Homer introduces a new figure. The woman at the right is probably derived from a rule book illustration (Figure 10). Homer moved this figure about as a graphic device in other compositions, and he employed it later in the 1860s, changing the figure little save for an updated costume at the end of the decade.

The lone figure from Homer's first croquet painting appears again, standing in approximately the same spatial relationship to a large tree trunk as she did in the earlier work. However, she no longer performs the *croquet*. That important bit of action is, appropriately, reserved for a more prominently placed figure, singled out by her light colored dress. Her position as the focal point is reinforced by Homer's decision to frame her with two women in red, like colorful parentheses. The woman in white daintily swings the mallet with one hand, striking the approved "graceful attitude," yet her pose also recalls a cruder image from *How to Play Croquet*, 1865, particularly in the turn of the shoulders and the set of the head with its fashionable little hat (Figure 11).

Such a hat is clearly seen in Homer's drawing, *Miss Florence Tryon*, executed in 1866 or 1868 (Figure 12). This drawing, along with the one of a man and two women playing the game, (Figure 8), introduces the only personal element in Homer's series: Miss Tryon was Homer's first cousin. It is probable that Homer played the game when visiting her in Belmont. The woman in the latter drawing might also be Miss Tryon. Perhaps her companion was pointing out some strategy that she ought to follow:

"In croqueting a ball, under any circumstances, always bear in mind the order of playing of all the balls on the ground. Thus: in croqueting a friend to a good position, be careful that you do not place him in close proximity to an enemy,





13 *Croquet Player*, 1865  
Oil on canvas, 8 1/4 x 12 1/4 inches, 21 x 31.1 cm.  
National Academy of Design, New York, New York



unless his play comes before that of the foe. Also, in croquetting an enemy, do not send him near his friends, neither near your friends, unless they play first."<sup>25</sup>

Homer's oil paintings, in contrast to the drawings, avoid any sense of the personal. There are two oils in Homer's second group of croquet images: *A Game of Croquet* (Cover, Figure 14) and *Croquet Scene* (Figure 29). These two closely related canvases were probably painted during the summer of 1866. We can speculate that the less elaborate Yale painting preceded the Chicago work, although this is unclear. In each case, we can only conjecture that Homer's cousin Florence served as a model for the young woman in blue, but we can be certain of Homer's strong interest in fashion. He has painstakingly rendered details of the woman's costume, including the feathered hat and jet beads.

The girl in red and white is a variant on the "reusable" figure first seen in the Albright-Knox version. In the Yale painting she seems about to attempt a *roquet*, striking her own ball so that it hits another and gains her a point. Homer has painted the figure without much detail, but she appears to be using both hands on her mallet, like a beginner. Her obvious target is the ball immediately to her left. Logically we may assume that the two players are opponents. The intended victim of the roquet shot calmly adjusts her hat while awaiting her turn, conforming with good croquet etiquette. Homer applied rich opaque colors in localized passages to give his figures a powerful individual presence at the same time reinforcing their apparent psychological distance from one another.

In the Chicago painting Homer has moved the two young women forward in the pictorial space. Their large dimension, along with two additional figures, makes the painting more compelling than the Yale version. Now we seem to have a "four-handed game," that is a serious match. The crouching male figure is probably adapted from another rule book illustration (Figure 15). The rule book figure is checking to see whether a ball has completely passed through its bridge, gaining a point and the opportunity for continued play. However, in the Chicago paint-

ing, the man is positioning one ball next to another. The ball he is placing belongs to the figure in red. The ball next to hers is going to be croqueted, or "sent up the country."

The young lady in red is Homer's third version of the "reusable" figure from the Albright-Knox painting. However, her role has been slightly changed again, in a sequential manner. Having roque'd in the last picture, she is now in a position to croquet.

The girl in blue is probably the recipient of the croquet stroke. Her primrose yellow-striped mallet seems to match the stripe on the ball about to be knocked away rather than the orange-pink striped ball to the lower left.<sup>26</sup> However, Homer's use of colored shadows makes the relationships difficult to determine. Discerning the difference between striped and solid colored balls was hard not only for the modern-day art historian, but also for players of the 1860s:

"There seems to be a tendency among persons unaccustomed to the game, to prefer a ball of the natural wood color with merely a stripe of paint to designate the players; but such a selection is not wise, because it is of the greatest importance that each ball shall be readily distinguished across the field, and with merely a stripe of color this is oftentimes impossible, especially if the grass is a little too high."<sup>27</sup>

In *Croquet Scene*, progress on the "grand round" must be well advanced. The starting post is visible at the left edge of the painting.<sup>28</sup> The colored stripes, indicating the order of play, do not conform to rule book suggestions.<sup>29</sup> Homer followed the rule book custom of alternating dark and light colors, but arbitrarily placed red at the top of the post where it stands out as a bright dot. Like a staffage figure, the post links the middle ground to the background of the painting. Other dots of red, in the form of striped croquet balls, are sprinkled at the outermost edges of the canvas. There are too many reds for a standard set of *croqueterie*, but the red dots help flatten the pictorial space while bringing the enormous expanse of the red dress into better balance. Alternating stripes—red, white, blue and black—repeat bands of color on the





14 Winslow Homer, *A Game of Croquet*, 1866, oil on canvas, 19 x 30 inches (48.3 x 76.2 cm.), inscribed l.l.: "Homer/1866." Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Bequest of Stephen Carlton Clark, B.A. 1903.



15 Man checking to see whether the croquet ball is legally through the wicket, wood engraving, from Scudder, 1865, p. 21.



16 Setting the balls for the croquet shot, wood engraving, ca. 1865, reproduced in Charlton and Thompson, opp. p. 104.





WHAT SHALL WE DO NEXT?—[DRAWN BY WINSLOW HOMER.]

17 Winslow Homer, "What Shall We Do Next?"  
wood engraving, *Harper's Bazaar*, 31 July 1869, p. 488.  
Collection Bowdoin College Museum of Art.



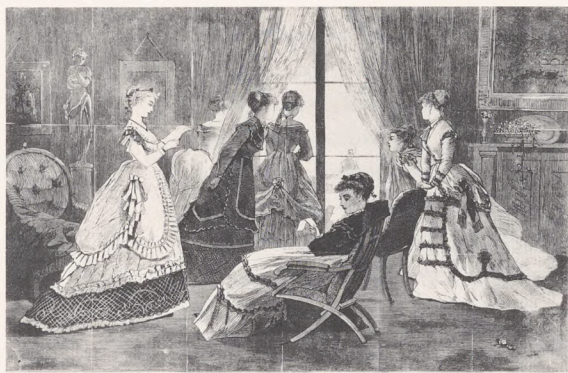
18 A croquet party, wood engraving, frontispiece for *Rover*, 1867.





SUMMER IN THE COUNTRY.

19 Winslow Homer, "Summer in the Country,"  
wood engraving, *Appleton's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Art*,  
10 July 1869, p. 465.  
Collection Bowdoin College Museum of Art.



20 Winslow Homer, "Waiting for Calls  
on New Year's Day," wood engraving,  
*Harper's Bazaar*, 2 January 1869, p. 9.  
Collection Bowdoin College Museum of Art.



21 Winslow Homer, "The Picnic Excursion,"  
wood engraving, *Appleton's Journal of Popular Science,  
Literature and Art*, 14 August 1869, p. 624.  
Collection Bowdoin College Museum of Art.



starting post, Homer also makes a visual pun, equating the croquet balls with several straw hats—yellowish rounds bisected by colorful stripes.

As the rule books consistently advise, most of Homer's wickets are painted white. Enough of the field is visible to suggest that the wickets more or less replicate a standard rule book layout, but pentimenti show that Homer moved several wickets, as well as a ball, for compositional reasons.

Seven of the eight balls from the *croqueterie* can be seen in the Chicago painting. We can assume that three are "dead" balls, lying to the left of the starting post. Four are in the foreground. The eighth ball could be hidden by voluminous skirts. The girl in red is about to use her own ball in performing the *croquet* upon another which probably belongs to the woman in blue. Because her mallet is hidden, we cannot determine whether the girl in red is friend or foe to the one in blue. The head of the man's mallet is hidden and we cannot read its colored stripe. His act of setting the balls in place for the croquet shot can be interpreted as a standard act of courtesy, seen in rule book illustrations (Figure 16). For a woman clad in stiff hoops and petticoats to bend down and place her ball would have violated the game's emphasis on graceful attitudes. The Chicago painting, like the others, combines contemporary data with artistic decision. Homer avoids clearly legible anecdote in this scene from modern life of the 1860s and relationships remain ambiguous.

Homer created his last group of croquet images following a ten-month trip to Europe which began late in 1866. The last group includes one oil, probably painted in 1867–69, and two wood engravings, both published in popular journals in 1869.

*The Croquet Match* is the only oil to contain an architectural setting (Figure 40). This painting differs markedly in style, palette and composition from the earlier works. To some extent, differences can be explained by Homer's travels. Light, bright colors and a luminous, sunny brilliance indicate that Homer had experienced the

bright palette of contemporary French art. Bands of relatively flat mountains and trees, the asymmetrical arrangement of forms and the hard angular emptiness of the porch suggest Homer's acquaintance with the conventions of Japanese woodblock prints, an important new stimulus of the 1860s. However, apart from the coloring of the central figure next to the porch pillar, Homer's palette is a patriotic one, dominated by white with touches of red and blue, and his architectural setting may be traced to an American source such as the frontispiece of Rover's *Croquet, Its Principles and Rules*, 1867 (Figure 18). A similar porch setting with a single prominent pillar that both divides and flattens the space can be seen in the frontispiece. Painting and print also have in common a figure in profile, seated in a chair on the porch.<sup>30</sup>

*The Croquet Match* was the springboard for an illustration published in *Harper's Bazaar* on July 31, 1869 (Figure 17). The artist jammed *What Shall We Do Next?* with anecdotal detail, as he did *Summer in the Country*, his only other wood engraving of croquet (Figure 19). The latter was published in *Appleton's Journal* three weeks before *What Shall We Do Next?* The painting and the two wood engravings are based upon the repeated use of a few forms, slightly changed from one composition to the next, a characteristic of the entire series.<sup>31</sup>

Reuse of established figures did not end with the series. In 1869, several wood engravings, as well as a major oil, benefitted from the croquet pictures. The woman in the folding chair from *The Croquet Match* was moved indoors for a wood engraving, *Waiting for Calls on New Year's Day* (Figure 20). The crouching male from the Chicago painting was cleverly reworked into another wood engraving, *The Picnic Excursion* (Figure 21). His croquet wicket became a picnic basket handle. In 1872, the figure in the straight-backed chair on the porch of *What Shall We Do Next?* was reversed and isolated in *The Butterfly*, a painting with obvious overtones of japonisme and aestheticism (Figure 28).

But the lone figure originally adapted from a rule book for the Albright-Knox painting proved to be Homer's most useful composi-





22 *Croquet Players*, 1865  
 Oil on canvas, 16 x 26 inches, 40.6 x 66 cm.  
 Inscribed, l.l.: "W. Homer/65"  
 Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York  
 Charles Clifton and James G. Forsyth Funds, 1941



tional device from the croquet series. She appeared in four of the five oils, brought up to date with a costume change for *The Croquet Match*. She is also included in both of the wood engravings of croquet. Moreover, Homer inserted the figure into two more prints as well as another major painting, all executed in 1869. Wearing the new dress, but deprived of her croquet mallet, the figure rests her hands on the back of a drawing room chair in *Waiting for Calls on New Year's Day* (Figure 20). She leans on an umbrella at the top of Mt. Washington in *The Coolest Spot in New England* (Figure 23). Finally, she lifts her umbrella in a fresh breeze as she teeters on the bluff at Long Branch, New Jersey (Figure 27). Homer was reluctant to abandon this slightly off-balance pose with its tentative, rather wistful quality. He used it as late as 1878, in a watercolor called *Fresh Air* (Figure 26). Implements from the fashionable game of the 1860s are absent. The young girl needs no mallet or umbrella to explain her presence or support her pose. Yet in the clasped hands, the straight form leaning slightly forward, the little skirt sweeping out behind, we recognize the compositional daughter of Homer's favorite croquet figure.

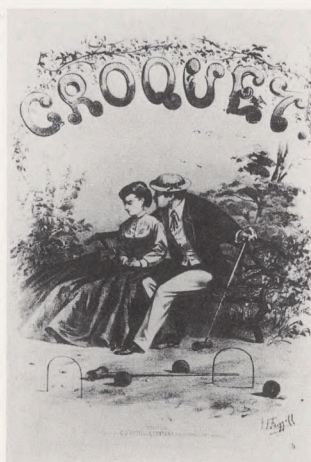
Homer was the first to depict the game in fine art, but croquet's hold on the imagination of artists and illustrators has endured from the 1860s to the present. The flood of rule books, the manufacture of beautifully boxed *croqueterie*, even the widespread Anglophilia of the nineteenth century are not sufficient to explain the game's fascination.

In 1855, the "Croquet Polka" was published in Boston by Oliver Ditson.<sup>32</sup> It had a lithographed cover, perhaps similar to the somewhat later example reproduced here (Figure 24). The lyrics and illustration of the song, along with a rule book cover embellished with a saucy pair of putti, indicate that the principal sport to be found on the croquet field was the game of love (Figure 25).

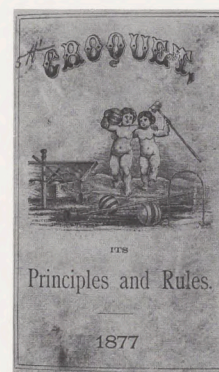
Croquet embodies deep and strong currents—sex and aggression—that made it a compelling subject. While the increased leisure time of the middle and upper classes made all types of sport-



23 Winslow Homer, "The Coolest Spot in New England—Summit of Mount Washington," *Harper's Bazaar*, 23 July 1870, p. 473. Collection Bowdoin College Museum of Art.



24 *Croquet*, sheet music cover, lithograph, reproduced frontispiece, Charlton and Thompson.



25 Cover for *Croquet, Its Principles and Rules*, 1877 edition.





26 Winslow Homer, *Fresh Air*, 1878, watercolor,  
20 1/4 x 14 inches (51.5 x 35.6 cm.).  
The Brooklyn Museum,  
Dick S. Ramsay Fund.



27 Winslow Homer, *Long Branch, New Jersey*, 1869, oil on canvas,  
16 x 21 3/4 inches (40.6 x 55.2 cm.),  
inscribed l.r.: "Winslow Homer/1869."  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,  
Charles Henry Hagden Fund.



28 Winslow Homer, *The Butterfly*, 1872,  
oil on canvas, inscribed l.r.:  
"Winslow Homer 1872,"  
15 1/2 x 22 3/4 inches (39.6 x 57.8 cm.).  
Cooper-Hewitt Museum,  
The Smithsonian Institution's  
National Museum of Design,  
1917.14.1.





29 *Croquet Scene*, 1866  
Oil on canvas, 16 x 26 inches, 46 x 66 cm.  
Inscribed, l.r.: "Winslow Homer/66"  
Collection of The Art Institute of Chicago,  
Friends of the American Art Collection, 1942.35



ing scenes common fare in the arts of the mid and late nineteenth century, croquet was the sport specifically defined in sexual terms as an appropriate field for women to compete with men in physical contest. Unlike other sports, croquet became the legitimate—and eventually not so legitimate—meeting ground for flirtatious encounters.

The idea of an immobile audience watching packaged entertainment, as at the ballet or the racetrack, also had its sexual innuendo. Considered unsavory yet titillating, dancehalls and outdoor cafe-concerts of the era were subjects for French and English artists who were particularly interested in observing flirtation, something that did not escape Homer (*Figure 32*). But the mere fact of socially-approved physical exertion in mixed company made croquet newsworthy during the 1860s and 70s:

"Hitherto, while men and boys have had their healthful means of recreation in the open air, the women and girls have been restricted to the less exhilarating sports of indoor life; or, if they ventured out, all the participation in the healthful out-door amusement and exercise they could indulge in was the tame and unsatisfactory position of mere lookers-on."<sup>33</sup>

We have already seen that rule books endorsed the dominance of women in this sport from the outset. Physical freedom and the chance to exercise both body and mind gained croquet its initial audience. Croquet was one of the first sports in which physical prowess was not the key to success:

"The game of croquet is the most scientific, healthful and social recreation ever known. Old and young meet on its arena on more nearly equal terms than in any other game of skill. A correct eye, steady hands and nerves, good judgment and clear brain, are the essential qualifications for a good player, and the possession of these advantages, of course, is not dependent upon the age, sex or condition of the person. And it may perhaps be considered as the chief excellence of this game, that it gives this opportunity, which very few other games combining scientific play and physical exercise afford, for

persons of the opposite sexes and disparity of age to join in one common amusement."<sup>34</sup> (*Figure 34*).

There were other games that stimulated the intellect, like whist or billiards, but these carried the dangerous temptation to bet. Early in the game's popularity, Mayne Reid averred, "Perhaps the finest argument in favor of croquet... is its morality. It has no taint attached to it, and never will. It is too refined... ever to become a gambler's game."<sup>35</sup>

Reid's prediction of an unsullied future for croquet proved unfounded. Gambling was by no means the only possible social pitfall. In the croquet game, contact and competition between the sexes was sublimated into an elegant, highly formalized ritual, occurring in a deceptively wholesome garden setting, amidst a display of finery and manners. Aggression took the form of roqueting and croqueting—knocking the other players' balls about the field. Ordinarily, illustrators and painters chose to depict a woman performing this athletic feat. Women usually outnumber men in the pictures, and are often visually dominant in the compositions. Males appear in subservient or passive roles, stooping to place a ball for the croquet shot, advising on strategy, standing idly in the background, with mallets upon shoulders or hands in pockets; or engaging in conversation with the opposite sex. All of these conventions are seen in Homer's croquet pictures. Like the game itself, his images exhibit a curious reversal of the then-current "doctrine of the spheres" which assigned passive and teaching roles to women.

Other artists of the era respected these same conventions. Manet's *Croquet Party*, 1873, focuses upon a woman about to make the iconic shot (*Figure 30*). One male is placed in the far distance, the other sprawls idle in the grass. Thomas Hill's *Palo Alto Spring*, 1878, shows the Stanford family and their friends during a game of croquet. Although young Leland Jr. was the powerful family's heir apparent, the artist has relegated him to a garden chair. Little Leland sits idle, with his mallet across his knees, while his female companions actively engage in the game (*Figure 33*).



It is not surprising that women seized their opportunity and that role-reversal was the inevitable result. Mayne Reid's formula for choosing team leaders is marked by almost militaristic terminology, but it was women who were to lead: "Two of the players are selected...as leaders or 'chiefs'. They may be of either sex; but [given] the spirit of the age, they should, perhaps be *ladies*." The chiefs were expected to "marshall" the opposing sides and were considered "enemies." Reid, a former Captain in the British military, continued his advice in war-like terms: "Their duty is to strike for first play...whichever wins has also the right of first choice of a partner from the company."<sup>36</sup> Given the fact that the company was often mixed, a young lady chief was offered a socially sanctioned Sadie Hawkins Day. The game soon became associated with sexually turned tables. The eventually well-worn joke was that "She, whom he came to croquet, croquets him." The croquet field became a visual metaphor for man-hunting, and a doggerel poet assured readers that "croquet may to Hymen's Alter lead."

Croquet gradually acquired an unsavory reputation born of the very freedoms that at first made it so attractive. In 1870, just after Homer completed his last croquet images, a popular journal warned, "It is the misfortune of croquet as a mere game that it has been found so admirably subservient to that higher game which all young men and women of good and natural impulses will play together whenever they have the chance."<sup>37</sup>

The couple trysting in the background, seen in Homer's *Croquet Players* (Figure 22), was to become another iconic image in depictions of croquet, especially those related to fashion. Such couples were later used in both popular illustration and academic painting (Figures 31, 35). Since a player's turn continued as long as he gained a "point" by running a bridge or roqueting another ball, there were frequent delays between turns. Moreover, a certain amount of time was devoted to strategic planning of the shots. Delays were especially long in games with six or more players. Delays, of course, led to dalliance; this was warned against in some of the books:



30 Edouard Manet, *Croquet Party*, oil on canvas, 1873, 28 1/2 x 41 3/4 inches, (72.5 x 106 cm.).  
Staedelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt.



31 Mrs. M. E. Freer, "Croquet," wood engraving, *Every Saturday*, I, 9 July 1870, p. 440.



32 Winslow Homer, "A Parisian Ball. Dancing at the Mabilie, Paris," wood engraving, *Harper's Weekly*, 23 November 1867, p. 744.  
Collection Bowdoin College Museum of Art.



33 Thomas Hill,  
*Palo Alto Spring*, 1878,  
 oil on canvas,  
 86 5/8 x 138 1/4 inches  
 (220 x 351.5 cm.).  
 Stanford Family Collection,  
 Stanford University  
 Museum of Art.



34 "Never Too Old to Play Croquet—  
 Nor Yet Too Young,"  
 wood engraving, *Harper's Weekly*,  
 9 August 1873, p. 700.



35 Frederik Hendrik Kaemmerer,  
*The Croquet Party*, 1877,  
 oil on canvas,  
 44 x 79 inches  
 (111.1 x 200.0 cm.).  
 Photograph courtesy  
 of William Doyle Galleries,  
 New York.







36 James Jacques Joseph Tissot, *Croquet*,  
ca. 1878, oil on canvas,  
35 3/4 x 20 inches (89.8 x 50.9 cm.).  
The Art Gallery of Hamilton,  
gift of Dr. and Mrs. Basil Bowman  
in memory of their daughter,  
Suzanne, 1965.



37 "The Croquet Queen",  
wood engraving,  
frontispiece,  
Mayne Reid, *Croquet:  
A Treatise, with notes  
and commentaries*,  
New York, 1869.



38 Hennessy, "Croquetting the Rover,"  
wood engraving,  
*Every Saturday*, I, 13 July 1870, p. 521.

39 A croquet party, lithograph,  
ca. 1860s, reproduced  
in Charlton and Thompson, p. 118.



"To enthusiastic players it will be unnecessary to give our concluding advice: mind your turn of play. What is more nagging to players interested in the game than to call out Blue! Blue! and, after repeated calls, to discover Blue politely talking with Pink at the other end of the field..."<sup>38</sup>

Although Blue was talking "politely" to Pink, it was sexuality that charged croquet images with tension.

Flirting was, at first, acceptable. One illustration was reproduced in an 1870 issue of *Every Saturday* with the notation, "Mrs. Freer's sketches of social life are always especially charming" (Figure 31).<sup>39</sup> Yet awareness of the darker side of flirtation was always present. Another popular illustration from 1870 shows one man surrounded by three women (Figure 38), something that Homer had done in the Chicago painting four years earlier. The wood engraving was accompanied by the following commentary:

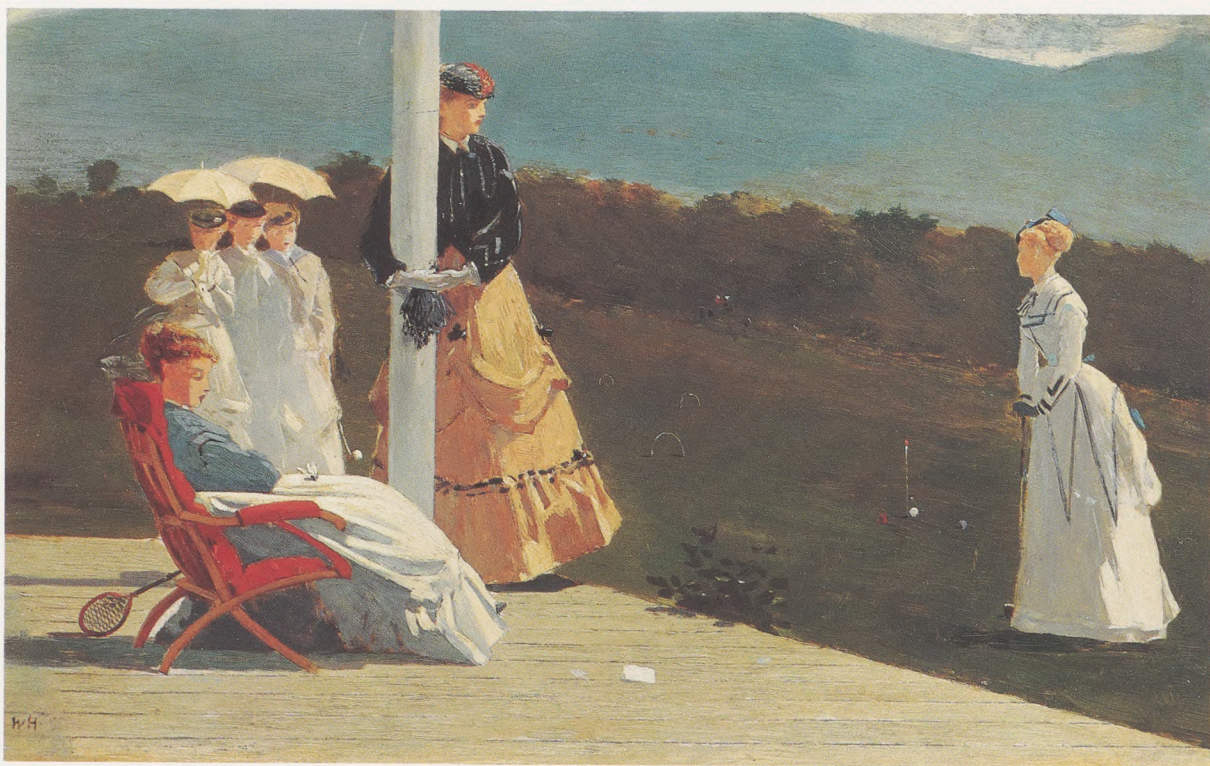
"The gentleman in the engraving is a rover who has been following up the lady on the right, who does not care for him, to the neglect of the two girls in the background who do. A novelist like Anthony Trollope would spin three hundred pages out of this."<sup>40</sup>

Even without Trollope, we can surmise that the lady on the right is about to send the gentleman's ball "to Hong Kong."

Fashion set the tone for gentle titillation. The iconic pose of the woman about to perform the *croquet* gave the assembled company the opportunity to obtain an exciting glimpse of ankle, or the "pretty mignon foot, piquantly encased in kid" (Figure 39). Anyone in doubt of the erotic charge available here need only read George Du Maurier's raptures on the exquisite shape of the heroine's foot in *Trilby*, one of the most phenomenally successful novels of the late 19th century.

The sexual undertone in the iconic image of the woman about to croquet was even described in a poem, *The Croquet Queen, a Warning to Croquetters Against Coquettes* (Figure 37):





40 *The Croquet Match*, 1867–69  
 Oil on academy board,  
 9 3/4 x 15 1/2 inches, 24.8 x 39.4 cm.  
 Inscribed, l.l.: "WH"  
 Private collection



"Her figure was faultless— nor tall, nor petite—  
 Her skirt barely touched the top lace of her  
 boot;  
 I've seen in my time some remarkable feet,  
 But never one equalling that little foot.  
 It's *tourure* was perfect, from ankle to toe—  
 Praxiteles ne'er had such model for art—  
 No arrow so sharp ever shot Cupid's bow;  
 When poised on the ball it seemed pressing  
 your heart!"<sup>41</sup>

The sexual challenge in croquet is most frankly expressed in James Jacques Joseph Tissot's painting, *Croquet*, 1878 (Figure 36). An alluring nymphette stands facing the viewer in a wanton hipsprung pose that goes far beyond the "graceful attitudes" recommended by early rule books. One can follow the order of play by counting the stripes on the balls. The ball in the foreground will be next to play, and Tissot directly involves the viewer in the sexuality of the game—for the ball is the viewer's and the prize is the enticing young lady.

However coyly expressed, sexuality eventually damned croquet as an acceptable social pastime. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was the victim of diatribes: "The ingenuity of man has never conceived anything better calculated to bring out all the evil passions of humanity than the so-called game of croquet." Warming to his subject, the anonymous writer went on:

"...the brute beast which underlies the thin polish of civilization is unchained; goaded to fury by each corrosive click of the croquet balls...the hoop, which beckons so temptingly and guilelessly from its carpet of green sward to cool and quiet croquet, is the gaping jaws of Hades. Who takes the mallet in his hand has grasped naked vice; and who passes through the treacherous wire portal leaves virtue, honor and charity behind."<sup>42</sup>

It seems clear that the iconic croquet stroke embodies more than a symbolic pressing of the heart. The woman places her foot on one of two closely juxtaposed balls, and administers a sharp thwack with a long stick; we have a rather thinly disguised symbol of female aggression against a male-dominated society. The *croqueterie*

is phallic and the gesture is castrating. Surely it is no coincidence that interpretations of croquet as an immoral game coincide with resistance to other aspects of various women's movements in the late nineteenth century. The fate of the game itself would seem to bear this theory out.

Eventually, croquet was seen as an encouragement to unhealthy competition that awakens "the dark spirit of jealous rivalry."<sup>43</sup> The evils of unchecked competition were still the subject for satire in 1932, when the author of "Croquet— Social Shock Absorber" avowed:

"One starts out pleasantly and laughingly enough; but before the third arch is reached, there may be a tightening of the lips, an abandonment of all decent impulses, with only the will to win firmly established in one's heart."<sup>44</sup>

The charged atmosphere leading to croquet's demise has to do with Eve and her apple. The real problem was role-reversal originally encouraged by the game. The will to win was a masculine trait: "as a matter of fact, croquet is a desperately cruel and masculine game of strategy."<sup>45</sup> As such it was revived by movie moguls of the 1920s, better known for their Hollywood studio-lot power plays than for their passionately aggressive and quarrelsome croquet matches.<sup>46</sup>

Simultaneously with croquet's decline into disrepute, a new game, called Roquet, developed. The first national association was founded in 1882.<sup>47</sup> The game stressed physical prowess and speed, and was frankly allied with billiards in regard to strategic planning. The game was intended for men only, there was no interest whatsoever in graceful attitudes, and women were once again relegated to the "tame and unsatisfactory position of mere lookers-on" (Figure 44).

Although croquet is currently enjoying a serious revival, and is played with great skill by many men and women in Britain, America, and elsewhere, the image of croquet in the arts has been a negative one since the mid-1860s. This situation extends to literature and even to advertising. Images are predominantly female, and usually



are filled with tension, sexual or otherwise, when they are not vapid or silly. A few examples will serve to demonstrate this. In *Alice in Wonderland*, 1865, Lewis Carroll placed the heroine at the mercy of a mad Dutchess, who dominated a topsy-turvy croquet field (not to mention her meek husband) aggressively yelling "off with their heads" as the male pack of cards debased themselves to serve as croquet wickets. John Tenniel's illustration showed Alice in the iconic pose, trying to manage her unwieldy equipment (Figure 41). The passage in the book describing this scene is full of tension and uncertainty.<sup>48</sup>

Tolstoy used a croquet match at the country house of a morally loose countess as the clandestine meeting spot for Anna and her extramarital lover in the novel *Anna Karenina*, written from 1873–1876, that is, during the height of the game's popularity.<sup>49</sup> A half century later, two films, one called *Love*, were based upon the novel, and a sultry Greta Garbo dominated the croquet scene.<sup>50</sup> At the same time that movie moguls were conducting their quarrelsome matches, studio publicity departments ground out saccharine images such as Shirley Temple playing croquet (Figure 45).

A fashion illustration from the early twentieth century coincides with a painting of women in a croquet field by John Sloan, one of several paintings of croquet by other artists in which feminine imagery dominates (Figures 42 and 43).<sup>51</sup> An author writing for a current house-decorating magazine unwittingly subscribed to croquet's historic image with a photograph captioned, "Leeds was always considered a woman's castle" (Figure 48).

A recent fashion advertisement again associates women and croquet, relegating an outnumbered male to the background while flaunting sexuality (Figure 47). In a contemporary alphabet, a rather perverse gathering of women on a croquet field illustrates the letter "S" (Figure 49). Even the souvenir shops at Disneyland perpetuate the iconography, offering for sale little ceramic figurines of Daisy Duck wielding her mallet (Figure 50). Donald Duck does not play croquet.

Croquet's negative image is reflected in art and literature even when no women are present. H. G. Wells chose *The Croquet Player* (1936) as the title for his psychological novel about changes wrought in a man's sensibilities after a stay on the English moors. Like the croquet ground, the marshes seem innocent, but are actually sinister and threatening. In Vladimir Nabokov's *Pnin* (1953), the title character appears in a suggestively-worded croquet scene, "holding his mallet very low and daintily swinging it between his parted spindly legs." After the game, Pnin experiences chest pains and anxiety as he recalls a dead love.<sup>52</sup> A similar atmosphere of foreboding pervades Christopher Sproat's recent sculpture, *Contemplating Croquet* (Figure 46), an image of modern malaise:

"This garden party is an illusion of comfort, wealth, order, and classical form. In reality, the couch is only marginally comfortable, the tools are unusable, and the rules have been altered to form a configuration that is too self-involved to afford active participation."<sup>53</sup>

Homer completed his series before croquet had been stamped as vile and degraded. When he took up his brush he was depicting a game still defined as "innocent, healthful and intellectual." The extent to which he drew upon early illustrated rule books makes it dangerous to read a great deal into the paintings—the isolated trysting couple, the idle swain with mallet on shoulder, the crouching gentleman placing a ball, the fashionably dressed lady about to make the *croquet*, all can be found in the popular imagery of the game. Still, there is a tension inherent in the game itself, one that was present from the outset, and one that can be felt in Homer's elegant images of the 1860s.

In his final painting, *The Croquet Match*, there are no men at all (Figure 40). The painting is pervaded by a sense of division and isolation. The porch pillar separates the woman on the far right from the other five. A black and tan costume isolates the central figure from the rest in their white dresses with embellishments of red and blue. Only one woman is seated. The composition is dominated by triangles of various



41 John Tenniel, "Alice playing croquet," wood engraving, reproduced in Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, intro. Martin Gardner, New York, 1960, p. 111.



42 Fashion plate, ca. 1920, reproduced in Charlton and Thompson, p. 123.





43 John Sloan, *Croquet*, ca. 1918, oil on canvas,  
16 x 20 inches (40.6 x 50.8 cm.),  
former collection Kraushaar Galleries.  
Photograph courtesy  
National Gallery of Art,  
photographic archive.

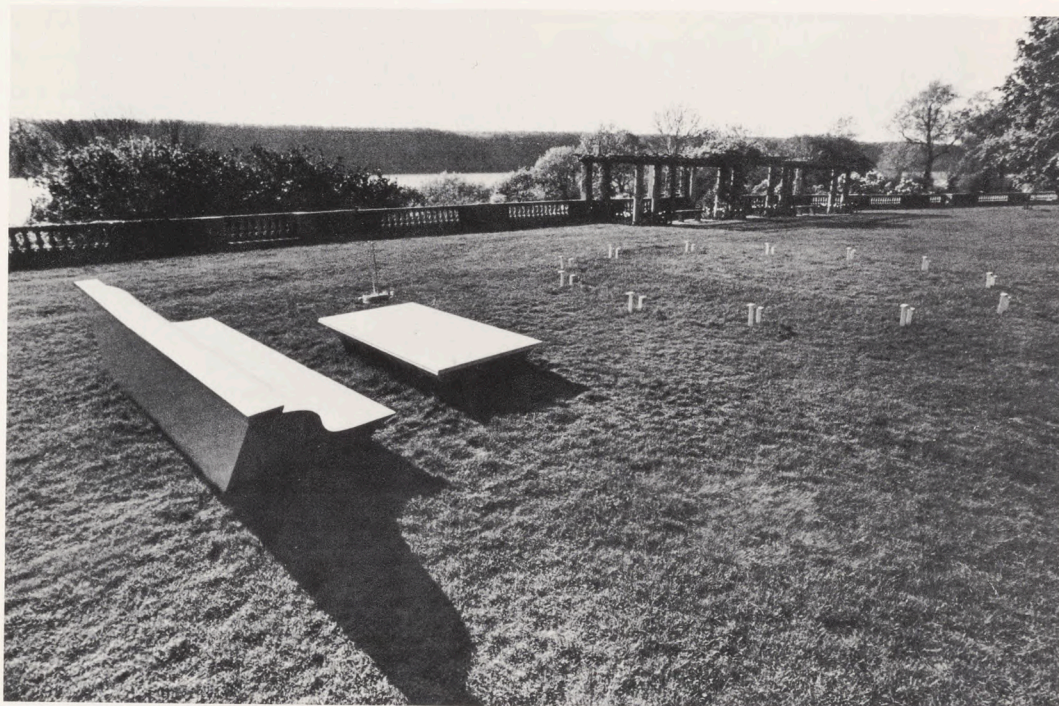


44 "Scene at a Southern Tournament,"  
(Roquet ground), from *Spalding's  
Official Roque Guide*,  
XIII:148, May, 1902, p. 54.



45 Shirley Temple  
playing croquet,  
reproduced in  
Charlton and  
Thompson, p. 22.

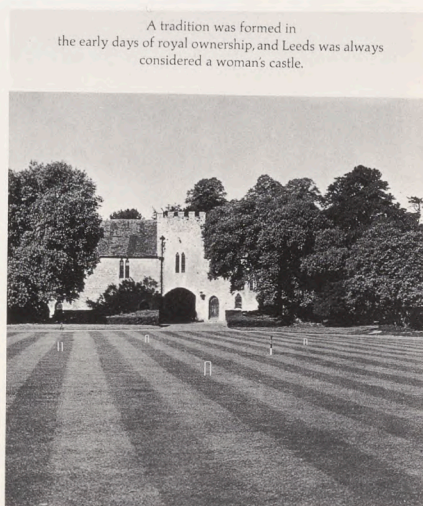




46 Christopher Sproat, *Contemplating Croquet*, 1981.  
Approximate size: bench 16 x 4 x 3 ft.; table 4 x 8 ft.;  
wickets, h: 1 ft.; circle, dia: 30 ft.  
Wood, fiberglass and acrylic.  
Photograph courtesy of Marbeth.



47 Advertisement  
for Maidenform Company,  
*The New York Times*  
*Magazine*, 4 April 1982, p. 33.



48 Leeds Castle, from Elizabeth Dickson,  
"Historic Houses:  
Legacy of a Norman Baron,"  
*Architectural Digest*,  
July-August 1978, p. 128.  
Photograph courtesy  
of Derry Moore.



49 Melinda Patton,  
"The Letter S"  
from an illustrated alphabet,  
1982, gouache.





50 Daisy Duck,  
ceramic,  
H: 4 inches,  
private collection.  
Design copyright  
Walt Disney  
Productions.

kinds. Although pressed together into a single compositional unit, none of the three figures in the background looks at her companions, and there is no eye contact between the three large figures in the foreground. Established by the woman in the chair, Homer's colorful triad of red, white and blue is also seen on end post, croquet balls and costume details.

It is impossible to make out anything in the far distance that would engage the attentions of the woman on the far right. She gazes inexplicably off into the landscape. The central figure clasps the porch post, as if for support. Eyes downcast, the woman in the chair holds a shuttlecock on her lap. On the porch lies a folded note. One of the three women in the background has her hands clasped, as if in surprise. One cannot help suspecting that somebody in the group has lost at the game of love.

The two wood engravings that complete Homer's series are anecdotal in comparison to the oils, their central focus appears to be the current fashion.<sup>54</sup> *Summer in the Country* was accompanied by a lengthy text which said, in part:

"...flirtation [is] connected with the game... there are the side whispers, the banterings, the numberless coquetries...hence young men and

women find the sport highly conducive to that keener and subtler game that youth and beauty are always eager to play. But Mr. Winslow Homer, in his sketch, has drawn only women players. It is pure...love of out-of-doors that has brought these ladies into the field. No deeper purpose is suggested."<sup>55</sup>

Homer's attention to fashionable trends is demonstrated not only by his first croquet oil, which coincided with the advent of the fad, but also by his last. In *The Croquet Match*, Homer painted a racquet in the shadow of the seated woman on the porch. Racquet sports, especially lawn tennis, were just beginning to replace croquet as favored activities for both men and women. Tennis soon became a popular subject for painters, although Homer was not among them. And, with the exception of occasional reuse of a figure from the croquet series, as discussed above, the artist abandoned the subject of croquet after 1869. It would seem that Homer chose to avoid delving further into the sexual implications of his subject as the game's reputation began its long decline. We can only speculate on the artist's awareness that what began in sports as "a perfect flower" according to one of the rule books, was rapidly becoming a "fleur de mal."



## Notes

- 1 See Henry Adams, "Mortal Themes: Winslow Homer," *Art In America* 71:2 (February 1983), pp. 112-16, for a review of the sexual interpretations, along with a discussion linking Homer to Freudian psychology.
- 2 James M. Charlton and William Thompson, *Croquet. Strategy, Rules and Records*, New York, 1977, p. 15. A tapestry that shows the game of *paille maille* is illustrated on p. 14.
- 3 The British reinstated croquet in France. Mayne Reid, an early popularizer, commented, "In France...where it [is] played, as at Biarritz, Boulogne, or Paris, it is chiefly by the English there residing." See Reid, *Croquet: A Treatise, with notes and commentaries*, New York, 1869, p. 11. The French soon took up the game as part of the general Anglophilia that influenced them to adopt British leisure activities during the mid-19th century. Alfred Stevens and James Jacques Joseph Tissot, artists who worked in both France and England, had croquet grounds in their gardens. Manet's painting, *Partie de Croquet a Boulogne*, 1871, records several of his friends playing the game.
- 4 "Crooky" was played in Portarlinton, Queen's County, Kilkee, as well as in County Clare and Kingstown, near Dublin. See Charlton and Thompson, p. 15. According to Reid, the Oaklands Croquet Club of Belfast was the oldest known club in the United Kingdom. See Reid, p. 11. The name derives from the Old French word for a shepherd's crook, according to the Oxford English dictionary, vol. II, 1933, p. 1191.
- 5 *How to Play Croquet. A New Pocket Manual of Complete Instructions For All Players. Illustrated with engravings and diagrams, together with all the rules of the game; hints on parlour-croquet, and a glossary of technical terms*, Boston, Amsden and Company, 1865, p. 5.
- 6 Reid, pp. 13-14.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 46. The Jaques family continues to the present day as a manufacturer of croquet equipment.
- 9 Prof. A. Rover, F.C.R. (pseud.), *Croquet: Its Principles and Rules, with Explanations and Illustrations for the lawn and parlor*, 3rd ed., Springfield, Mass., Milton Bradley and Co., 1867, p. 11. Some sets also included colored metal clips, patented by Jaques, which were moved from hoop to hoop as the game progressed, helping players to keep track of others' whereabouts. None of Homer's paintings shows the clips, however, and the British popularizer, Mayne Reid, decried the clips as detrimental to the "scientific" exercise of rational strategies.
- 10 The 1869 edition of Rover includes a full-page advertisement for "Bradley's Patent Croquet," patented on April 17, 1866. See p. 71.
- 11 Rule books usually included a section at the end with definitions of the game's extensive terminology. "Trotting out the scape-goat" meant knocking one ball into another so as to place it in a more favorable position, while "sent up Salt River" was a term "applied to a side when all its members fail to pass the wickets, strike the stake and go out." See



- R. Fellow (pseud. Horace Elisha Scudder), *The Game of Croquet; its appointment and laws; with descriptive illustrations*, New York, Hurd and Houghton, 1865, p. 31. Scudder was an editor and writer chiefly involved with children's literature. *Dictionary of American Biography*, ed. Dumas Malone, VIII, New York, 1935, p. 522.
- 12 Charlton and Thompson, p. 17.
- 13 *Croquet. As Played by the Newport Croquet Club. By One of the Members*, New York, Sheldon & Company, 1865, p. iii.
- 14 Reid's complaints about plagiarism accompanied a reprint of his own treatise, in *Onward* (June 1869), pp. 502-505.
- 15 These include Scudder, as well as the anonymous *How to Play Croquet*, both cited above. Milton Bradley's *Handbook of Croquet* was in its second edition by 1865.
- 16 Rover, 1867, p. 30.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 18 Reid, p. 35.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28. The croquet shot could be used to aid a friend or distress an enemy.
- 20 *Croquet Player* shows numerous croquet balls scattered about the ground, but only one player, suggesting that the work might be unfinished or abandoned. The inscription on the reverse, "Winslow Homer would like to have the privilege of painting...a better picture," seems to bear this theory out.
- 21 Scudder, pp. 28-29. Scudder suggested that players "obey the law of grace," while Reid noted that for ladies, "the fashionable bend will bring them wonderfully near to the correct position," p. 48.
- 22 Scudder, p. 29.
- 23 Reid, p. 47.
- 24 "The whole science of croquet consists in the combinations, in the mutual support which may be afforded by friendly balls. Four balls is the largest number that can be scientifically used, and inasmuch as open consultation between the players will be...fatal to strategic movements...one of the players on each side must be absolutely master of the other...The perfect game can only be played by two or four persons at most. A fifth and a sixth may be generously taken in for courtesy, but their presence is absolutely fatal to the interest of the game. "Croqueting the Rover," *Every Saturday*: An Illustrated Journal of Choice Reading, I, (13 August 1870), p. 515.
- 25 Rover, 1869 edition, pp. 57-58.
- 26 "Each mallet should have a color corresponding to its ball, painted on the handle near its insertion in the head; these colors are not so much for the sake of keeping the mallets and balls in pairs, as for the purpose of distinguishing the players." Scudder, p. 12.
- 27 Rover, 1869 edition, p. 65.
- 28 We know that it is not the turning post, because croquet was played clockwise.
- 29 For example, "The upper half of the Stakes are painted alike with the eight colors in contiguous rings, and these may be best laid on in the following order, beginning at the top: black, white, yellowish green, bright blue, brown, pink, scarlet, yellow." Scudder p. 13. Other combinations occur, but the books are consistent in suggesting black and white for the first two colors, designating the two team chiefs.
- 30 A porch is also illustrated in the frontispiece to Scudder's rule book of 1865 (see Figure 9), but the composition of Homer's final croquet oil seems much closer to the illustration in Rover, 1867 edition.
- 31 The now familiar lone woman, who stands at the right in *The Croquet Match*, appears yet again in the Harper's wood engraving. She has been reversed and placed near the pillar that neatly divides the pictorial space into architecture and landscape. The figure also appears in the Appleton's wood engraving. The four girls in Appleton's have been reworked for Harper's, with additional figures added. The single figure from *The Croquet Match* stands in the same spot in each print. The two central girls are reversed. The one at the right in Appleton's becomes two for Harper's. Even the porch column in the last oil in the series serves the same function as the tree trunk in the second oil. The treatment of the woman clasping the porch pillar in *The Croquet Match* also recalls Homer's earlier oil paintings with figures supported by strong verticals, such as *The Waverly Oaks*, or *The Initials*, both from 1864.
- 32 Cited in *Winslow Homer Graphics* (exhibition catalogue), intro. David S. Tatham, Houston Museum of Fine Arts, 1977, no. LSM5.
- 33 *How to Play Croquet*, 1865, pp. 6-7.
- 34 Rover, 1877 ed., p. 3. As such, the game was admired by some of America's intellectuals. See "Rational Enjoyment: Idlewild, the home of Nathaniel Parker Willis," lithograph, ca. 1860, reproduced in Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society. The Formative Years, 1760-1860*, New York, 1970, fig. 6.
- 35 Reid, p. 5. In June, 1869 he serialized his 1863 rule book in the short-lived uplifting periodical called *Onward*, of which he was editor.
- 36 Reid, p. 25.
- 37 "Croqueting the Rover," *Every Saturday*, p. 515.
- 38 Scudder, p. 29. The colors indicate that a man is chatting with a woman.
- 39 *Every Saturday*, vol. I (9 July 1870), p. 440.
- 40 "Croqueting the Rover," *Every Saturday*, p. 515.
- 41 Reid, p. 8.
- 42 "The Immorality of Croquet," *Living Age* (15 October 1898), p. 200. Entire article 199-200. The magazine was published in Boston and edited by E. Littell.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 199. The game's potential for aggression is parodied in the earliest cartoons. One, called "Fact and Fancy," appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1869. It showed one man surrounded by three women, one of whom is about to make a croquet shot. The text is as follows: Miss Gushington (sotto voce), "I've got her now the little Minx. She's been cheating all through— she purposely got on Charlie Devcreux's side— she's knocked me away from every hoop, and (aloud) My darling Edith, I'm afraid I shall be obliged to give you a little Tap. I can't help it, can I, dear?" *Harper's Bazaar* (31 July 1869), p. 469. Another cartoon, titled "Brotherly Love", reads: Naughty Tom, "Oh, Ma, look; here's a lark! I put a croquet-ball into Arthur's mouth, and he can't get it out!" *Harper's Weekly* (1 August 1868), p. 469.
- 44 Charles Hanson Towne, "Croquet, Social Shock Absorber," *Arts and Decoration* (August 1932), p. 28. Entire article pp. 28-29, 59.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- 46 Charlton and Thompson, pp. 23-29.
- 47 W. H. Wahly, "Roque— Modern Croquet," *Outing*, vol. 38 (September 1901), pp. 662-66.
- 48 "'Get to your places!' shouted the Queen in a voice of thunder, and people began running about in all directions... Alice thought she had never seen such a curious croquet-ground in all her life: it was all ridges and furrows: the croquet balls were live hedgehogs, and the mallets live flamingoes, and the soldiers had to double themselves up and stand on their hands and feet, to make the arches. The chief difficulty Alice found at first was in managing her flamingo... Alice soon came to the conclusion that it was a very difficult game indeed." From Martin Gardner, *The Annotated Alice*, New York, 1960, pp. 111-112. Lewis Carroll also invented "Castle Croquet," a complicated game that he liked to play with the Liddell sisters. It was first published in 1863.
- 49 Edward Wasiolek, *Tolstoy's Major Fiction*, Chicago and London, 1978, p. 212.
- 50 Both were made by MGM; *Love* in 1927, a silent film in modern dress with John Gilbert, and *Anna Karenina*, a costume drama with sound, costarring Frederic March in 1935.
- 51 Martin Mower's *The Croquet Party*, ca. 1913, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, is obviously indebted to Homer's series. Other croquet paintings I have been able to locate but have not discussed in the text include James Saint, *Miss Martincau's Garden*, 1873, The Tate Gallery; William McGregor Paxton, *The Croquet Players*, 1898, T. W. J. Valsam collection; and Louis M. Eilshemius, *Croquet*, ca. 1906, Private Collection.
- 52 The scene is tinged with sexuality when Pnin creates "a minor sensation by changing into bermuda shorts expressly for the game." Vladimir Nabokov, *Pnin*, New York, 1957, pp. 130-33.
- 53 Artist's comment, *Tableaux*, (exhibition catalogue), Wave Hill, The Bronx, 15 May - 18 October 1981.
- 54 *What Shall We Do Next* occupied an entire page in *Harper's Bazaar* (31 July 1869), p. 488. On the opposite page was another wood engraving showing young women in a flurry of trunk-packing, before setting off on vacation.
- 55 Homer's wood engravings are consistently less profound than his paintings, a predictable quality that would be expected of an illustrator. Quotation from Appleton's *Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Art* (10 July 1869), p. 465.



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